

Radio Finland's Teri Schultz

A journalist's journey from America
to the northern land of the midnight sun.

By Jeff Chanowitz

Sisu is the Finnish word for perseverance. In Finland Teri Schultz is the American personification of the word. Despite many obstacles, Teri eventually established herself as the English voice for Finnish news for shortwave listeners and television viewers worldwide.

Picture Teri sitting in the broadcast booth at Radio Finland's studios located in Pasila, just outside the Finnish capital, Helsinki. Teri, a young, blue-eyed, light-brownhaired woman, seems at ease typing and reading radio scripts for later broadcast. Yet, her transition from American television journalist to Finnish reporter was not an easy one.

Teri's journey began with her graduation from New Mexico State University. Her goal was to become an international broadcaster. Being young and inexperienced, this possibility seemed out of reach in the United States. Consequently, she looked to Europe searching for an opportunity to work overseas. After a year of "bombarding" YLE Radio Finland with tapes, she found herself with a job as a television producer at YLE and reporter for Radio Finland.

With two hundred dollars in her pocket and all her belongings in a trunk, Teri quit her television job in Texas and arrived in Helsinki the next day. "I moved from 100 degree Texas temperature to the cold Finnish weather in September... I did not know anybody and did not have an apartment," Teri remarked about her first difficult weeks in the country. She quickly found out that apartments are very expensive and hard to find in the Finnish capital.

With no hope of renting affordable living space and her money running out, Teri was forced to live out of a youth hostel for the first couple of weeks. Her situation seemed dismal as she had neither enough money for housing nor a plane ticket back home. With the help of a relative who knew a Finnish doctor, Teri managed to solve the housing problem. Yet, her cultural adjustment to life in Finland was another unanticipated barrier. Teri commented, "It was very difficult for me at



Teri Schultz is lucky enough to get an interview with one of the "shy Finns" for her "Out and About" program.

first because Finnish culture is not an immediately open one.. Nobody would talk to me!"

Teri found herself in the position of being the first American addition to Radio Finland's staff in over a decade. She was described by some of the management at Radio Finland as the "new journalistic animal," for her new ideas and American reporting style. This style included both reading and writing news for broadcast; traditionally written and read by two different people. Representing a shift toward a new journalistic direction, Teri encountered considerable friction between her and some staff members of Radio Finland.

Although Teri utilized some innovative ideas, she also had to adapt to a different journalistic style. "Radio Finland has a style of its own," Teri said explaining that Finnish reporting uses a more formal style than the American. Fewer adjectives are used, and story content can seem very dry. This was quite a contrast to the "happy, talkstyle" that Teri was familiar with in American television.

She also learned that the phrasing of an issue was important. For example, in Finland, the Chinese military crackdown could only be described as the "crushing of the democracy movement" rather than a massacre because the Finnish government had not recognized the suppression as a massacre. Nor does the Finnish press play as much of an adversarial role as in the U.S. according to Teri. She added, "I think that it should be the responsibility of the media, and shortwave included, to provide critical views of governmental policy."

Such stories as discrimination against gypsies, and tensions between Finns and blacks (mostly Africans) should be covered more critically in her opinion. Having listened to Radio Moscow, Teri added, "Their programing is more critical than Radio Finland's!"

After a year on the job, Teri became comfortable as one of Radio Finland's 35-member staff, which is the second largest external service in Scandinavia.

Radio Finland was formed in 1939, a critical year in Finnish history. During that year, Finland was invaded by Soviet troops and forced to fight alone for its political survival against overwhelming odds. Also at that time, the external service voiced Finland's cause to the world. English is the oldest foreign language service at Radio Finland.

Teri agrees the external service is still important today. "Since most Americans will not travel here, Radio Finland provides the only information most will receive about this very interesting country. It also provides Americans of Finnish ancestry (mostly located in Michigan) with a chance to learn about their heritage."

For Finnish Americans, Radio Finland provides information on the country's history. Teri commented, "While I think we should provide more information about modern Finnish life, we do a good job of balancing programs about Finland's past with ones about the present."



"Any report on Finland written for an international audience must begin with the assumption that 'nobody knows anything about the country.' To most Americans and many Europeans, the sparsely-populated Scandinavian country of 5 million people bordering the Soviet Union is a mystery. The few stereotypes that exist concern the cold climate or the large amount of forests that cover Finland. Teri remarked, 'I can relate to the quantity of people who know nothing about Finland.' Before arriving in the country, Teri found it hard to get any information on Finland other than history books on the Finnish/Soviet war. Because of her own experiences, Teri tries to produce programs that take listeners out of the studio into the towns and events that mark the life of Finns."

"Out and About" is a program that Teri produces to give listeners insights into Finnish life. Designed as a tourism magazine, the program takes listeners from interviews with Santa Claus during Christmas in the Northern town of Rovaniemi to the many festivals that take place during the summer. Commenting on subjects chosen for the program Teri stated, "A story that would not mean anything to a Finn is a story to a foreigner. It's a story to go to a festival in

summer and describe the streets and the people. Common things, like Mid-Summer, are never heard of in the States."

Many of the subjects for the program are picked from audience suggestions. Listeners think of Finland as an exotic place and are curious about the lakes, Lapland, and Finnish winters. One memorable listener from the Philippines wrote that the program "tickled her toes" and made her feel like she had "visited Finland," which had brought her "great joy." Teri finds a personal satisfaction in the letters sent by listeners. "With shortwave you feel isolated from your audience. You send out information to Canada or South America. When you get a letter, it humanizes the audience."

Another program that Schultz produces is "Close-Up." The program features man-on-the-street interviews with Finns about contemporary subjects. Because Finns are very shy, getting answers to Teri's questions has proved very difficult. She commented, "I would spend hours trying to get answers to questions. If I would come up to a bus stop with a microphone, they would run away." When Teri did manage to pin Finns down, many would not comment on political questions. Even when asked their favorite color, many Finns answered with a firm "I would prefer not to answer that question."

Teri recalled one particularly terrible winter morning. While freezing on a Helsinki street, she searched in vain to get one Finn to answer to a question on what they were planning to do during Mid-Summer. Teri's frustration was so great that she talked jokingly about "finding foreigners and have them answer her questions with fake Finnish accents." Alluding to Finland's 45 year-old international policy of remaining neutral, Teri described the Finnish reluctance to answer any question as "neutrality in its most extreme."

"Air Mail" is a program that Teri participates in with Kate Moore. Teri describes the program that answers listeners mail as "the most fun and

Teri is not only an international broadcaster for Radio Finland, but also finds time to report for CNN's International News Hour.



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A picture from Provinssirock in Seinajoki. The Finnish rock band "Nights of the Iguana" plays at one of the summer festivals that Teri enjoys covering for her "Out and About" program.

loose program on shortwave." She added, "We read listeners letters and make fun of them... We make fun of Finland and ourselves." The program even makes fun of Radio Finland's slogan, which on the program is "News of the North and More... Kate Moore." One memorable program included an interview with a participant of a herring festival. When asked about herring, the woman responded with some rarely found honesty stating, "I do not like herring one bit... it's an awful fish." It should not be surprising that during the war in the Persian Gulf, many listeners wrote in to thank Teri and Kate for their humor, which gave many people a respite from the heavy news of the war.

Teri refuted the myth that a journalist's life is only fun and travel, declaring, "There is no glamour as an international journalist in Finland." The reality is low pay, long hours, and hard work. Remarking about a story on the Soviet hijacking of an airliner to Finland, Teri recalled being at YLE's studios late at night trying to talk to CNN (Cable Network News based in Atlanta, Georgia) by phone, while the Estonian cleaning lady's radio was blasting out rock music. She recalled pleading with the cleaning lady not to turn on the vacuum cleaner before finishing her last report to CNN. Teri also recalled on another occasion having to change in the woods of Rovaniemi while dodging mosquitos in order to prepare for a television news story.

Yet, as a reporter in Finland, Teri has the vantage of going into greater depth with her stories than in the United States. Says Teri, "Ten minutes of air time to do a feature on a summer festival is unheard of in the U.S., where two minutes is the norm."

Additionally, Finland, as the gateway between east and west, allows other unique opportunities to cover international conferences. Teri commented, "There is not a lot of spot news, but there are many diplomatic conferences." The summit between Gorbachev and Bush in Helsinki

was an example. Teri bragged, "During the summit I told Peter Jennings where the bathroom was." At a conference on the Middle East, Teri interviewed a PLO delegate and an Israeli delegate. Although neither delegate talked with each other, both delegates told Teri separately that they would be interested in negotiating.

Teri's most memorable story involved a total eclipse of the sun in Joensuu, a city located in the eastern part of Finland. When assigned to cover the eclipse, Teri was perplexed. "What am I going to say for six minutes about the sun going away and coming back?" So she went to work researching eclipses and talked to people about the fly-by viewing planned by the Finnish national airline, FinnAir. During the event, Teri positioned herself on an island that gave her a good view. As the sun disappeared, she described the color of the sky and the reactions from the birds and other wildlife.

After putting the story together, Teri was upset. She thought that the story was terrible, but had to go with it anyway. When the program finally aired, to her surprise, the story received the most amount of positive feedback of anything she had produced for Radio Finland.

Yet, the stories that Shultz loves to cover are about the hundreds of festivals that take place during the summer. She commented, "I love to talk to people at festivals... Coming from a news background, I ask them what's the party and what are you partying about." She also enjoys hunting for special things about Finland. "I find it a challenge to find reasons for people to come and visit Finland during spring, summer, and fall. No one has written me saying I went to Finland because of your program, but I have received some nice letters."

Teri's view of shortwave is that "It's essentially an international relations lesson in itself." While in the United States, Teri had never heard about shortwave. But now she is very adamant about the benefits of DXing. "No journalism

student should finish university studies without knowing about shortwave broadcasting. It is so fascinating.... It lets you know what is going on in China and other countries." In her view, with the lack of indepth international coverage at local radio stations, shortwave is now really the only outlet for such news coverage.

Teri's experience with shortwave listeners at ANARC conventions and through the mail have been positive ones. She is glad to hear there are serious listeners, but correctly surmises that DXers are quite a diverse group stating, "I think that DXers are often stereotyped as people who sit in their basements with little gadgets, when many people use shortwave for different reasons." Teri pointed to the Gulf War when shortwave was used as an educational tool as an example of this fact.

In Finland there are so few foreigners that Teri herself has become an ambassador of sorts. She commented, "I find myself defending the United States because there are very few Americans here." More than once she has been asked "why did you (Americans) start the Vietnam War?" She also finds herself clearing up a lot of the misinformation about life in the U.S. She remarked, "I think the Finns have too rosy a picture of the United States. I find myself supporting a lot of things that Finland has... like a decent comprehensive welfare and social security system."

In addition to her work at Radio Finland, Teri produces reports on a freelance basis for other broadcasters. She is currently heard on Radio Norway, Radio Sweden, BBC World Service, and Radio Deutsche Welle. U.S. Radio listeners can hear Teri on the American Public Radio program "Market Place." She can also be seen on CNN's "International News Hour" and World Vision television. Teri also writes for various English language magazines.

Talking of her two and half year experience at Radio Finland, Teri recommended, "Anyone who wants to be a credible international journalist has to leave their own country. You have to see things from a different perspective." She personally found that, "Finland, with its closeness to the Soviet Union and neutrality is a very useful country to be in."

Reflecting on her experiences, Teri summed it up: "I have learned so much." An ambitious journalist, Teri has already moved on to do more freelance work for radio and television networks. But, with tighter budgets and smaller staffs, shortwave needs more broadcasters like Teri Schultz to provide innovative and exciting ideas for the next generation of shortwave listeners.

U.S. listeners who want to receive a program schedule, check the latest program updates, or ask a question, may call 1-800-221-9539 or write Radio Finland, Box 10, 00241, Helsinki, Finland. For any readers who don't already know, Radio Finland has a strict non-QSL policy.

